

Governor Rod R. Blagojevich
Director Charles D. Johnson

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Heat Threat More Serious for Seniors

If it seems harder to cope with the heat than when you were younger, you may be right. The body's cooling system becomes less efficient with age, and this puts increased stress on the heart. That is the word from Illinois Department on Aging Director Charles D. Johnson, who has issued a list of reminders to help older people deal with the heat that is expected this summer.

"I want to remind older people now to take steps to avoid heat stress," Johnson said. "Although most of us bundle up against the cold, we often fail to recognize that extreme heat and humidity pose similar threats, particularly as we age."

Mr. Johnson said humidity combined with temperature make up the heat index, which is similar to the wind-chill factor in winter. If the temperature is in the 90s with high humidity, it can feel like it is well over 100 degrees.

To cope with heat, Johnson says older people should take these steps:

- Avoid long exposure to the sun,
- Drink plenty of fluids, remembering that water is best,
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol,
- Spend as much time as possible in an air-conditioned or cool environment – either at home or at community cooling centers,
- Use fans in well-ventilated areas, remembering that a fan in a closed room simply redistributes the heat,
- Have family, friends and neighbors check on seniors regularly to see how they are withstanding the heat,
- Never ignore danger signals like nausea, dizziness and fatigue,
- If you or anyone you know needs medical attention, call 911 or 311 immediately,
- Take cool baths or showers and use cool compresses on your neck and wrists,
- Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing,
- Avoid strenuous activity, especially during the middle of the day,
- Avoid heavy meals and using cooking ovens,
- Do not take salt tablets unless directed by a physician,
- Keep shades drawn and blinds closed, but windows slightly open, and
- Keep electric lights off or turned down.

During heat emergencies, communities are involved in door-to-door outreach; senior centers, adult day service sites and other familiar buildings serve as cooling centers, and information is provided on an ongoing basis through agencies serving seniors, Johnson said.

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